Church Psalmody

D. C. Frink

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CHURCH PSALMODY,

A Sermon preached by Rev. D. C. Frink, B. A., *Pastor of the Congregational Church, Melbourne, C. E., Sunday, July* 8, 1866.

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Psalm, 149 : 1. Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, *and* his praise in the congregation of saints.

One of the apostles classifies sacred praise as "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs." It simply implies *variety* adapted to the different conditions of worshipful feeling in which we approach God. This apostle, as the church has always done, made much of singing in worship.

Our religious nature is best expressed in prayer and praise. For man to utter confession before God, when convicted of his sins, or to plead for help being in want, is no more natural than for him to sing being in joy, gratitude and hope. Therefore it is that singing or chanting has been an essential part of worship in all ages. And hence it is not so much that Christianity introduces it, as that it "puts a *new* song into the mouth, even praise unto our God."

Christian piety delights to recount mercies received. It dwells largely upon them, and doing so, much exalts its graces. Trust, patience, love and hope, spring naturally up from the contemplation of good received. The heart grows strong as well as comely, remembering mercies. So doing, how easy to sing,

> "When all thy mercies, O my God,
> My rising soul surveys,
> Transported with the view, I'm lost
> In wonder, love, and praise."

or to say with the sweet singer of Israel, "I will sing unto the Lord *because he hath dealt bountifully with me*." "Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant and praise is comely."

Since singing constitutes a very essential portion of

Sabbath worship, we should come to the church as often to *sing* as to pray. In truth fervent piety comes to twine a grateful wreath, a worshipful garland of Bible instruction, prayer, meditation and sacred song. All these are taken up with an earnestness proportionate to the piety of the worshiper. But especially is our emotional nature uttered in praise. We sing our griefs, our joys, our triumphs, and our hopes. And now when the singing of sacred praise constitutes so essential a portion of our worship, how ought every one to enter upon this act of devotion with the whole heart! This leads me to my first point.

WHO SHALL SING?

and the answer is already anticipated, *all* should sing, in whom there is the spirit of worship. "Let *every heart* rejoice and sing." This is the only part of the worship where all can actively join. But one replies, "all cannot sing!" True, we sadly reply, for want of that early culture which all should have gotten to prepare each one for so important a form of worship with which to enter not the Sanctuary only, but every day and place of life. I cannot say but some could never sing, but they are very few. These, however, are not those who have had the faculty, but who hid their talent calling it one, or who used it only enough to prepare for a blundering work. Too many bring this worship with such outward blemishes as unfits it for public worship. Does the worshiper lament it? God did so first, when he foresaw the evil provided for in early neglect. But the most can sing to some extent. Those who cannot must add the more to other forms of worship.

And in respect to those who can sing, and in whom there is a heart to so worship, it becomes no longer a privilege only but a duty. God asks it. I think Johnathan Edwards spoke a plain truth when he said it was *sin* not to sing, having the ability. Praise

is for the whole assembly ; confining it to a few has no appointment from God ; thus it becomes formal, cold, heartless, and infinitely more so when those who do sing have *no* or very little interest in it as worship. I have ever viewed it as a sin when so brought into Sabbath worship. Singing has this that is different from other forms of worship, it is for the whole worshipping assembly.

HOW SHALL WE SING?

This question, God has given the first answer to, "with the heart and the understanding also." Any other singing is mockery.

Two evils in singing should be here mentioned :— First, singing *to one another*. There are other times and places for the exhibition of talent far more comely. Besides if it is worship, it is the worship of one another, rather than of God. The second sin is singing to admire ourselves. This is very vain. I have known of congregations where this sin might be found. Perhaps some time ago some one did it here ! To see it in its true light would, I think, lead us to disown it if possible. Like Israel's prince of song let us all say fervently, "I will sing *unto the Lord* with my *whole heart*, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation."

Here I cannot but recall to your minds the blessedness in the fact that every heart, high and low, rich and poor, bond and free, with common riches, glory and exaltation in Christ may unite with one spirit. What *unity* is here ! Sin allows of the only differences. Christ hides all. Sin may lead one to sing the sinner's lament, and triumphant grace give another, an angel's song. But in worship, with Christ, its author and finisher, there is a common brotherhood.

But while we say all the worshipers should sing, and that the value of Church Psalmody is in such congregational singing, we should say a word upon

the manner of rendering it. This will be introduced under the idea of

HARMONY.

Nothing should contradict that harmony of spirit which God hears in a concert of worshiping hearts. I believe there are no discords in God's idea of worship. Harmony of souls should be expressed by harmony of voices in praise. I am not of that Chinese taste that would wish to hear only one part sung by all; yet I would in every way prefer this to a labored discordant introduction of parts. Discord wrenches the heart from worship and robs it of all its value.

God has arranged the human voice into four classes,—a high and a low, for both male and female voices. Still all *may* sing the same in unison. The singing of parts is only for those who are cultivated for it. Therefore to attempt to sing other than the one part known, is to introduce an ambitious pride which in no way improves the heart's worship. Parts in music well sustained greatly promotes pleasing expression. But one word in a known tongue is better than a thousand in an unknown; and an unknown part is a strange tongue. God forbade the Jew to bring a blemished offering to the altar, it expressed a heart unfit for worship. Let us present a perfect and not a defective praise. If you are to prepare your *heart* for worship, so no less is that preparation to find a like care in its expression.

To forbid any one to sing were to forbid God to ask it, which he does. But to ask every one to sing in harmony is certainly to accord with God's wish. I sometimes think we are ashamed to sing one part with all, assuming it to be out of dignity, and so labor away at what is unknown. O, dear brethern, how pride tries to have a finger in all we do. And yet every touch of his is a leprous spot upon our worship.

I can only hint at what has been done for some

time in parts of England to promote ease and harmony in sustaining the parts in church music. Those singing different parts are arranged respectively in different parts of the house. So each part being together, the strong sustain the weak, and one guides another. Sittings are taken in different parts of the house according as one or another part is sung. But if this cannot be effected with us,

MORE SHOULD BE DONE IN LEARNING TO SING.

If one cannot recite a lesson well, he is required to *learn* it. Shall we do less with one of the most essential parts of our worship. Nothing human admits of more culture than the voice; and nothing reveals culture more. It is the organ we can cultivate especially for God's worship. We are called upon to sing. Says a late writer, Rev'd. H. Mayo Gunn, "Our Psalmody ought to be well performed. Praise in gratitude, love, trust, joy, and adoration is better than prayer. Our Psalmody should be done better rather than worse."

Let us never forget who hears our praise. If you were to sing the same sacred song before even your neighbor, you would wish to have time to prepare; you would seek one to tell you your faults. And yet how we often rush before our Sovereign. It is time the church was more interested in preparing to *well* express what we feel bound to express at all. We dare not refuse to worship; then let us prepare a whole offering in love and labor. On Sabbath our King invites us to his royal feast; it commemorates his deliverance from the power of death, that he might become our Life. Let our Garment of Praise be fitly put on; let us bring nothing which indicates indifference.

Now let me turn your minds to one of the most important respects in which we can view Church Psalmody:—I mean it as

A MEANS OF RELIGIOUS POWER.

First, in leading souls to Christ. Dr. Guthrie tells us of a scoffer once in his congregation who carried her infidel and scoffing spirit out to the disturbance of others. She was appealed to, but to no effect. At last the congregation began to sing the Hymn "Too Late." Before the first verse was sung she was obliged to leave the house. She was brought to Christ, and afterwards received to his church. Such, however, I think no very uncommon effect of Church Psalmody. How *many* have seen Christ as a Savior then as never before! How many have then had their hearts melt to obedience before God! How many a burden of sin has rolled away! And how many a stout heart has been convicted. It becomes us then to sing bearing this in mind. So solemn indeed will become our praise and *very* acceptable before God.

Not less, in the second place, do the burdened hearts of God's people find relief. How common is it, indeed, for grief stricken hearts, burning with fever heat, allowing no tears but only agony, to be soothed and melted to tears, which were as a shower upon the parched earth. Let us sing with this in mind. Let us bring out, therefore, a perfect expression in the voice for the thought in the words, singing high or low, loud or soft, quick or slow, as the verse or line decides. This will be worship. This will be praise. What a power may we make of it. Every Sabbath with our praise may God feed the hungry, give cups of cold water to the weary and thirsty, and all get the blessing of those who worship in the beauty of holiness. Using praise for this purpose, the children are brought before us with interest.

THE CHILDREN SHOULD SING.

Let the children be taught our hymns. Let them

be arranged in the church with a view to their singing; not in the gallery, for that should be for the organ and those who *cannot* sing. A chorus of children's voices will be better than an organ and will give our singing a fresh interest. And now to prepare them and us for the Sabbath, and improve our home worship, should we not find a place for

SINGING IN FAMILY DEVOTION.

I find invariably those children taking delight in church praise who are so brought out at home. And to say nothing of the improvement of the home worship, how pleased would God not be to find the children of the covenant brought to so engage in Sabbath worship.

Finally, let us no more bring an indifferent offering; let us *perfect* praise in fear and love. We sing a wondrous love; we offer praise for glorious deeds wrought by our God. Let us fervently sing as he turns our night to day, or takes away our sorrow and bears our grief.

"Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints."

1 AWAKE and sing the song
Of Moses and the Lamb!
Wake every heart, and every tongue,
To praise the Saviour's name!

2 Sing of his dying love;
Sing of his rising power;
Sing how he intercedes above,
For those whose sins he bore.

3 Sing, till we feel our hearts
Ascending with our tongues,
Sing till the love of sin departs,
And grace inspires our songs.

4 Sing on your Heavenly way,
Ye ransomed sinners sing!
Sing on, rejoicing every day
In Christ, th' exalted King.

5 Soon shall we hear him say,
"Ye blessed children come!"
Soon will he call us hence away
To our eternal home.

6 Soon shall our raptured tongue
His endless cause proclaim,
And sweeter voices tune the song
Of Moses and the Lamb.

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